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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 005111

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DHAHRAN SENDS
PARIS FOR ZEYA, LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/27/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SA](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: TRIBAL LEADER PLAYS POLITICS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE
CAUSEWAY

Classified by Consul General John Kincannon for reason 1.4
(d).

¶1. (C) In a June 21 meeting with Consulate Dhahran and Embassy Manama PolOffs, Essa Al-Dossary, self-styled deputy sheikh of the Al-Dossary tribe in the Eastern Province (EP) and the Kingdom of Bahrain, described to PolOffs the nature of his influence on both sides of the causeway. Al-Dossary explained that he is a leader of the branch of the Al-Dossary tribe that migrated from Bahrain to the EP in 1923 after a dispute with the Al-Khalifa family. According to Al-Dossary, roughly 5,000 members of the tribe migrated at that time, of whom several hundred returned to Bahrain soon thereafter. Al-Dossary claimed that there are 60 to 70 thousand Al-Dossaris currently in the EP who are in his branch of the tribe. (Note: Al-Dossary's claim to be "deputy sheikh" of this group of Al-Dossaris derives from the stature of his elderly father, a leader of the group in his active years and still its symbolic leader. Other Al-Dossary contacts told us that Essa is not uniformly recognized as a tribal leader, and one said he thought the number of Al-Dossaris from the Bahrain branch in the EP was much lower than 60 to 70 thousand. End note.)

¶2. (C) Al-Dossary acknowledged that the authority of tribal leaders had diminished greatly as the state developed. "When our leader decided to leave Bahrain in 1923, everyone came with him. Now, if I decided to go back, only my family would come with me. Tribal sheikhs once controlled the road, now we control only the sidewalk." Still, Al-Dossary continued, he had "keys" at his disposal that gave him some authority: "For example, if someone from my tribe commits a small offense and gets put in prison, I might go to Prince Mohammed (Emir of the EP) and use my relationship with the Prince to get him released." Al-Dossary noted he maintained excellent relations with Riyadh Governor Prince Salman and King Hamad of Bahrain, in addition to Prince Mohammed.

¶3. (C) Another "key" Al-Dossary mentioned was his role as a political broker in the context of elections in Bahrain. He noted that all members of his branch of the Al-Dossary tribe are eligible for Bahraini citizenship but declined to estimate the number who had actually obtained it, saying only that it was a "good number." Unless they owned property in another district in Bahrain, Al-Dossary continued, those who obtained Bahraini citizenship were registered in one of three districts the Al-Dossary tribe had inhabited before migrating in 1923. He identified two of these districts as Budaiya and Zallaq and was quick to claim all three were heavily Sunni. Al-Dossary said that he played a role as mediator, or broker, between potential Al-Dossary rivals in the same constituency: "In the last election, for example, in one of the districts there were three or four Al-Dossaris who said they wanted to

run. I invited them over here to my office (in Dammam), and we talked about the issues and negotiated, and we decided on one candidate to run." Asked if he ever considered running, Al-Dossary said no, explaining that "If I was a candidate, then I would not be in a position to support another candidate. I would lose one of my keys." (Note: In a conversation with Pol FSN, another member of the Al-Dossary tribe estimated that 20 to 30 thousand Saudi Al-Dossaris had Bahraini citizenship, although he said this number included some Al-Dossaris who were not from the branch that migrated in 1923. He also claimed that it had become more difficult over the past few years for Saudi Al-Dossaris to obtain Bahraini citizenship due, he speculated, to political sensitivities. End note.)

¶4. (C) Comment: Al-Dossary's comments offer a snapshot of how tribal identities continue to matter in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, even as the state's importance grows and the tribe's wanes. As he clearly understands, whatever influence Al-Dossary possesses as a tribal leader comes from his "wasta" with key ruling family members. His leadership among the Al-Dossaris, to the extent that it exists, depends on the favors officials like Prince Mohammed bestow via his intervention. To the extent that the wasta system loses importance or that other means develop to tap into the system, his influence would diminish. In his discussing how the possibility of dual citizenship for Al-Dossaris impacts Bahraini elections, Al-Dossary was clearly sensitive to, and trying to refute, Bahraini Shi'a claims that Bahrain's policy of offering dual citizenship to some Saudi (Sunni) nationals greatly disadvantages the Shi'a. End comment.

¶5. (U) This cable has been cleared by Embassy Manama Political Officer Michael Mussi.

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(APPROVED: KINCANNON)
OBERWETTER